

**Education Policy Commission  
Minutes for Meeting on March 23, 2009**

In Attendance: Don Collins, Mike Deweese, Johannah Donovan, Retta Dunlap, Teri Geney, Brian Howe, Tom James, Bill Rivard, Brigid Scheffert, Laura Soares, Martha Tucker, Kyle Weinreich, Karrin Wilks, Lisa Ventriss,

Unable to Attend: Michele Forman, Chris Koliba, Chris Robbins

Observers: Amy Cole, Karen Stewart

DOE Staff: Armando Vilaseca, Bill Romond, Kay Charron, Jane Murtagh

**Reflection on March 23 Meeting**

Individuals were asked for their observations and reflections since the last meeting:

- importance of our policy work being based on Pre-K through grade 16
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills key focus of transformation and our work
- Discussion of policy vs. procedure and processes; the thought of the group is to stay with policy
- The readings help a lot informing our work and seeing what is policy
- There is loose and tight approach to policy making where you focus on high leverage areas and control them tightly while protecting lots of flexibility in other areas. The commission appears to agree with this approach.
- The question was asked about bringing in presenters with expertise to help and there was broad agreement that this would be critical once we have some initial work drafted so the commission could get reactions and new input to their policy directions. All draft policy will be reviewed from the perspective of what is best for the student.

**Welcome from Commissioner Vilaseca**

Commissioner Vilaseca stopped in on the commission to thank them for their time and dedication to complete this important charge from the State Board of Education.

**Group Norms**

- Keep ourselves student centered
- Pre K – 16 focus
- Speak your mind to get concerns on the table, quiet stewing is not helpful
- Allow reflection time
- Decision making by the commission will be done by consensus and when the DOE declares that consensus is not possible on an issue decision making will move to a majority vote with a record of minority opinion (how folks might vote when not present was raised but not resolved due to remaining confusion over “public meeting” requirements). This norm resulted after a substantive discussion of various options regarding decision making.
- Maintain transparency and openness but willingness to use executive session if needed (legal issues related to “public meeting” determination as executive session is tightly defined for public meetings)

- Agree to professionally disagree; avoid over personalizing
- Talk from the learners perspective, think of flexible learning environments.

### **Meeting Protocols**

In addition to norms, there was some discussion of more general meeting protocols.

Raise hands and be called upon to speak. – Yes, for now as group is forming.

What is the best balance between whole group and small group work activities? – group seem to form two perspectives on this – part of the group favored doing everything in the whole group format and another part of the group felt that moving between whole group and small groups would be essential to making progress on such a large task

Would we be more productive with extended (full day) meetings? – While most members thought extended meetings would be useful, Kay said she would send out an email to get specific information on availability for extended meetings from each member. Based on what info we get there, we will decide to adjust our meeting times as appropriate.

How free are we to discuss the commission's work outside of meetings?

- Want to be transparent but also want commission members to be able to speak their minds without worry of being quoted publicly on an issue.
- We agreed that we should share ideas outside the commission but that we would never attach names and identities to positions on issues; respect the identity of members.

Who else statewide knows we exist, what kind of media attention has there been?

- We have not done general marketing of the commission's work early on and building community from the beginning.
- There has been a lot of community building around transformation (by the State Board and by DOE) but not strategically around the policy commission.
- We do post meeting minutes and materials on the DOE Web site so interested parties can get a sense of your work.
- Every state board meeting has an update on the transformation policy commission on the agenda. That is all open to the public.

### **Policy Making Exercise**

The commission explored characteristics of effective policy by looking at a couple VT policies they felt had an impact on practice. After discussing a couple samples, the commission identified a number of characteristics of effective policy:

- Policy had a clear goal and purpose
- Responds to an issue where diverse stakeholders agreed that it needed to be addressed; policy was a vehicle for pulling partners together around common values
- Policy did not over prescribe HOW the goal could best be attained, but...
- had embedded accountability that makes it possible to monitor and support progress; expectations clear and compliance required
- Policy implementation supported with funding and technical support

- Policy expectations defined in ways that were realistic for stakeholders needing to implement it
- Policy action fit with cultural beliefs; implementers believed in it
- Balanced specificity to make it definitive and clear with flexibility so implementers could tailor to their own situations; focus on outcomes and directions – not on specific practices
- Synthesized differing perceptions of an issue so policy could be supported broadly

### **Continue to Explore Policy Making**

Commission then reviewed a policy development cycle that would increase chances that policy proposals would incorporate some of the characteristics of effective policy.

Commission took time to explore in more depth the first step of the cycle – Discrepancy Definition. This step includes identifying the discrepancies between what we want for student results and what we are currently getting, analyzing root causes for each identified discrepancy, selecting high leverage change strategies based on the root cause analysis, and finally listing some actual school practices that would have high potential for full implementation of the change strategies and attaining the desired student results.

To practice this step of the policy cycle, the commission viewed a video of a school working to transform and filled in information for each of the 4 parts of Discrepancy Definition.

- Commission found it easy to separate out the 4 parts of step 1 using the video.
- Discussion of video lead to the question of whether the video was illustrating “transformation”. Several expressed the feeling that this is nothing new and not necessarily the vision of transformation individual commission members want to “buy in to”. This ended with an awareness of how important the root cause analysis is so that policy work could address what has limited or prohibited progress on school transformation in the past.

Commission ended their meeting with a very initial list of potential policy ideas of interest:

Reworking Teacher Licensing

Scheduling/school calendar

Framework of Standards

State Accountability measures for school and student success

Funding

Connections PreK-16

Graduation requirements

School quality standards

Teaching & learning practices

School choice

There was some common interest among commission members to focus policy on areas that can influence at Teacher Level.

Commission members also filled out a quick survey on the readings that had been provided to help identify which ones seemed to be the most useful. It appears that the Rhode Island 2008 policies, Chapters 4, 7 & 10 in the Darling Hammond book, and the West Virginia Web site got the highest marks for value.

**HOMEWORK:**

Individual members will complete the Discrepancy Definition Process for VT public education and submit to Kay by 4/3. Kay will synthesize the individual work as a starting place for our continued work at next meeting on April 13.